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DECEMBER 24, 1958
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FROM: MOSCOW

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TO: Secretary of State

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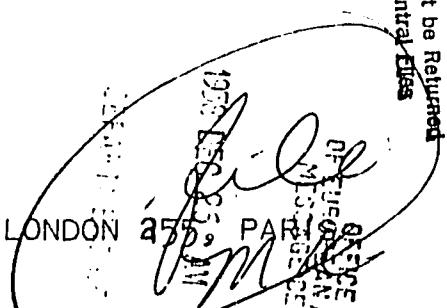
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SENT DEPARTMENT 1341, REPEATED INFORMATION LONDON 255, PARIS 237, BONN 162, BERLIN 85

TASS STATEMENT ON NATO AND PRAVDA ARTICLE BY D. KRAMINOV ATTACKING JOSEPH ALSOP APPEAR PART OF CONTINUING SOVIET EFFORT TO PRESENT PEACEFUL POSTURE TO WORLD, BUT MAY ALSO REFLECT SOME WORRY ABOUT EXTENT TO WHICH WEST HAS MOBILIZED ITS PUBLIC OPINION TO SUPPORT STRONG ASSERTION ITS RIGHTS IN BERLIN AND ABOUT DEVELOPING IMPASSE.

TASS STATEMENT IS NOTABLE FOR COMPLETE BY-PASSING OF NATO STATEMENT ON BERLIN AS WELL AS FOR NEW CALL FOR NEGOTIATIONS BASED ON DISTORTED READING OF NATO COMMUNIQUE. INITIALLY, SOVIET PRESS HAD ATTACKED NATO STATEMENT FOR ITS FIRMNESS ON BERLIN AND FOR ITS EMPHASIS ON REARMAMENT. CURRENT TASS STATEMENT ALLEGES THAT AT COMMUNIQUE INDICATES THAT WESTERN POWERS "DO NOT, AS THEY DID PREVIOUSLY, MAKE SETTLEMENT OF QUESTION OF EUROPEAN SECURITY DEPENDENT ON SETTLEMENT OF GERMAN QUESTION," AND THAT ON THESE GROUNDS, IF WEST IS SINCERE, THEN "IN OPINION OF LEADING SOVIET CIRCLES, THERE WILL BE NO INSUPERABLE OBSTACLES TO SUCCESSFUL RESOLUTION OF THESE QUESTIONS, OR AT LEAST SOME OF THEM." HOWEVER, IN EMBASSY'S UNDERSTANDING, NATO COMMUNIQUE DID EXPLICITLY LINK TWO ISSUES. SOVIETS WOULD THEREFORE SEEM TO BE ANXIOUS TO SHOW WILLINGNESS TO TALK TO WEST (THOUGH UNDOUBTEDLY AS PREVIOUSLY WITHIN FRAMEWORK OF SOVIET "SECURITY" SCHEMES) BUT TO MAKE OUT AS IF WEST HAS TAKEN INITIATIVE FOR SUCH TALKS AND THUS TO AVOID APPEARING TO BE NERVOUS ABOUT SITUATION. AT VERY LEAST, SOVIETS HAVE NOW PUT THEMSELVES IN DOMESTIC PROPAGANDA POSITION TO CHARGE WEST AT LATER DATE WITH RETREAT FROM SUPPOSED READINESS TO NEGOTIATE ON EUROPEAN SECURITY AFTER SOVIETS ALLEGEDLY SOUGHT TO MEET WEST HALFWAY.

ATTACK ON ALSOP BELABORS HIM FOR SUGGESTING THAT WEST PREPARED TO GO TO WAR ON BERLIN. ARTICLE SAYS "SOVIET PEOPLE UNDERSTAND OF COURSE THAT HYSTERICAL ALSOPS DO NOT

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DIRECT U. S. POLICY" BUT NOTES THAT VARIOUS LEADERS STILL SEEK TO TALK TO USSR "IN LANGUAGE OF CRUDE FORCE." KRAMINOV INSISTS THAT USSR HAS NO INTENTION TO SEIZE CITY AND SAYS THAT KHRUSHCHEV STATEMENTS HAVE EMPHASIZED THAT "SOVIET UNION DOES NOT WANT TO CREATE DIFFICULTIES FOR WESTERN POWERS IN BERLIN OR COMPLICATE THEIR POSITION. IT GAVE THEM REASONABLY LONG PERIOD TO REACH UNDERSTANDING ON SETTLEMENT OF BERLIN SITUATION WITHOUT HASTE AND CONFLICTS." HE CONCLUDES THAT: "SOVIET UNION DID NOT AND DOES NOT WANT WAR" BUT IS "MONOLITHIC, STRONG AND POWERFUL AS NEVER BEFORE" AND IS "READY TO GIVE CRUSHING REBUFF TO ANY ATTEMPT OF AGGRESSORS BY FORCE TO FOIST THEIR WILL ON PEOPLES OF SOCIALIST COUNTRIES."

BOTH TASS STATEMENT AND KRAMINOV MAY ALSO BE DESIGNED TO REASSURE SOVIET PEOPLE, FORMER BY SHOWING THAT CHANCES FOR NEGOTIATION STILL EXIST, LATTER BY PARTIALLY SEPARATING "HYSTERICAL ALSOPS" FROM U. S. OFFICIAL POLICY AND BY AVOIDING MORE EXTREME THREATS OF RETALIATION WHICH APPEARED, FOR EXAMPLE, IN ZAKHAROV STATEMENT OF DECEMBER 19.

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